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**MAIN CONSPIRATOR IN CORSICANA ILLEGAL ALIEN
HOSTAGE-TAKING SCHEME
SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON**

United States Attorney Richard B. Roper announced that Damacio Andrade-Castaneda was sentenced today by the Honorable Jorge A. Solis, United States District Judge, to 20 years imprisonment for his role in operating an illegal alien hostage-taking ring in Corsicana, Texas. During a trial in May, Andrade-Castaneda, age 43, was convicted of one count of conspiracy to commit hostage taking, one count of hostage taking, one count of conspiracy to transport and harbor illegal aliens, one count of harboring illegal aliens, and one count of transporting illegal aliens. Co-defendant Diego Sicay-Ajcot, age 38, was also convicted in May for his role in the scheme and was sentenced last week to 87 months imprisonment. Sicay-Ajcot was convicted of one count of conspiracy to commit hostage taking, one count of conspiracy to transport and harbor illegal aliens and one count of harboring illegal aliens. Six other defendants involved in the same operation have pled guilty, and most have been sentenced.

“Let this lengthy and just sentence be one of many such signals to human smugglers of the high price they’ll pay when they treat humans as expendable cargo for their own profit,” said John Dennis, Acting Special Agent-in-Charge for the Dallas office of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). “Our ICE special agents will continue to partner with law enforcement agencies and the U.S. Attorney to bring these criminals to justice for a long, long time.”

The Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement shut down the alien-smuggling/hostage taking operation in October 2003. This particular smuggling ring had hubs of operation in Piedras Negras, Mexico, San Antonio, Texas, and in Corsicana, Texas and smuggled illegal aliens into the United States from Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. The would-be illegal aliens were approached by

“coyotes” who would tell them that they could smuggle them into the country for an agreed-upon, set price and that they wouldn’t have to pay the fee until they arrived in the United States. At trial, witnesses testified that they were led through the desert across the border, and then later picked up by a truck. They testified that there were 18 people packed into the bed of the truck and that they traveled this way to San Antonio. In San Antonio, they waited for another truck to pick them up to take them to Corsicana. When the illegal aliens arrived in Corsicana, Andrade-Castanada, and others, contacted their relatives and demanded money for their release – demanding more money than the original agreed upon price. In fact, relatives of the illegal aliens were threatened and told that they would never see their relatives again unless they paid the money.

Witnesses testified that while their families tried to get the money together for their release, they were held, under guard, in the small back bedroom of a home located at 1025 West Summitt, in Corsicana. The owner of that home was a distant relative of Andrade-Castanada who rented the room to him for \$250.

Diego Sicay-Ajcot was one of the guards at the house on West Summitt. He had earlier been smuggled into the country by the same organization and told Andrade-Castanada that he would work for his freedom.

U.S. Attorney Roper said, “I applaud Judge Solis for the tough sentence he handed down today for this human smuggler and kidnapper.” Roper continued, “The message to any would-be human cargo smuggler or kidnapper should be crystal clear — you’d better think twice before you try to earn a quick buck in this fashion, because law enforcement will find you and you will pay for your criminal actions for a very long time.”

U.S. Attorney Roper praised the cooperative investigative efforts of the Department of Homeland Security - Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the Corsicana Police Department; and the Navarro County Sheriff’s Department. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Tammy Reno and Aisha Saleem.